

Northolt High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101943
Local Authority	Ealing
Inspection number	307860
Inspection dates	20–21 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Janet Mercer HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1401
Sixth form	244
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs L Woodcock
Headteacher	Mr C Modi
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2004
School address	Eastcote Lane Northolt Middlesex UB5 4HP
Telephone number	020 8864 8544
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Northolt High School is a larger than average comprehensive school, serving an area with higher than average levels of social and economic deprivation. The proportion of students eligible for school meals is above average. More than a quarter of students have English as an additional language and around half of these are at early stages of learning English. The proportion of students with English as an additional language is increasing year on year and around half the students in the sixth form have English as an additional language. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is above average. The largest groups, after White British, are Black African, Black Caribbean and Indian.

The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or statements of special educational needs is broadly average, but it is increasing in Years 7 to 9. The majority of these students have moderate learning difficulties, and a significant number have behavioural and emotional difficulties. There are smaller numbers with speech and language difficulties, visual impairment and dyslexia. The school was awarded specialist technology status in 2002 and received re-designation in 2007.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Northolt High School provides a satisfactory standard of education for its students. The quality of the curriculum and care, guidance and support are good. The school is an inclusive and harmonious community, where students learn to work well together and respect others. The great majority of parents who responded expressed positive views about the school. Senior and middle managers have developed a culture of honest and open self-evaluation that makes good use of performance data to identify strengths and areas requiring further improvement. Inspectors found that the school's own judgments were accurate.

Standards of attainment are satisfactory and students make the progress expected, relative to their prior attainment. In 2007 students did not make enough progress during years 10 and 11, and GCSE results declined compared to the previous year. The school implemented appropriate improvement strategies and GCSE results improved in 2008. Average points scores for GCSE subjects were close to the national average, indicating that students had made satisfactory progress overall, although the proportion achieving 5 or more A*-C grades including English and mathematics remains below national average. The school has rightly identified that White British students do not always achieve their full potential. Managers are targeting improvement strategies to raise achievement for these students.

Most students enjoy their work and other activities that the school offers. The school has used a wide range of strategies to improve attendance and behaviour, both of which are satisfactory. The increasing range of vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 is effective in meeting students' different needs, interests and abilities. The school makes good use of its partnership arrangements to broaden the choice available at Key stage 4. This has not yet extended to the sixth form, where vocational options are more limited. The emphasis upon personalised, independent learning, through the 'building learning power' programme is being increasingly embedded in the curriculum at Key Stage 3. Students talk positively about this as it helps them develop learning skills they can use in all subjects.

The specialist technology status is driving improvement in teaching and learning. In technology lessons observed, students were well motivated and the coherence of learning, teaching and assessment is raising student achievement. However, this good practice is not yet fully shared across all subjects, so teaching and learning overall are satisfactory. In the best lessons, teachers ensure that students are actively involved in their learning and can work independently. This engages students' interest and inspires them to learn, but in too many lessons, students are not challenged enough to improve the standard of their work.

The quality of care and support provided is outstanding, but academic guidance is only satisfactory. Very good multi-agency working provides excellent support for students and specialist, personalised learning support enables those with learning or emotional difficulties to achieve well. This approach has not yet been extended across the school. Academic guidance is improving, but target setting, progress monitoring and feedback to students on how to improve their work is not yet consistent across all subjects.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Students' achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory. Pass rates on A-level courses are usually high, and pass rates on AS-level courses improved in 2008 and were in line with national

averages. The smaller number of students taking applied AS and A-level courses have not achieved so well, and although pass rates improved on these courses in 2008, they remained below national averages.

The school offers good a choice of AS and A-level courses, but the range of advanced level vocational courses is limited to applied business and information and communication technology (ICT). There are few courses available for those who are not yet ready for advanced level study. This limits progression opportunities for Year 11 students, about half of whom stay on in the school sixth form. The school is actively involved in local 14-19 partnerships but this has not yet had sufficient impact on developing the range of post-16 provision available to students in the school.

Personal development in the sixth form is satisfactory. Attendance is satisfactory and behaviour is good. However, relatively few students contribute to the school or wider community. Students are mature and ambitious but have few opportunities to share their growing confidence and skills beyond the classroom.

Teaching and learning is satisfactory. The best practice supports students in developing independent learning skills and provides useful feedback to students on their progress and how to improve. However, academic guidance is not consistent between subjects. Assessment is not frequent enough to help new sixth formers know how to work towards personal goals or academic targets.

Learners are well cared for and value the regular support they receive from teachers and tutors. They receive appropriate careers education and guidance and most Year 13 students progress to further or higher education or employment. There is too little targeted support for those at an early stage of learning English.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the use of assessment for learning strategies to strengthen the approach to personalised learning across the whole school.
- Use the existing good practice in active and independent learning to improve teaching and learning across the whole school.
- Make better use of the existing partnership arrangements to increase opportunities for sixth form students.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students join the school with below average attainment. They make good progress during Years 7 to 9 and standards by the end of Key Stage 3 are broadly in line with the national average. The school has identified that there was still some underachievement in English at Key Stage 3 and 4 and mathematics at Key Stage 4 in 2008 and is putting in place appropriate strategies to raise achievement. Results in specialist subjects in technology and science in Key Stage 4 improved markedly in 2008.

Standards of students' work are satisfactory overall, but there are variations in the quality of work and its presentation between subjects. Students are not always challenged sufficiently

to produce the highest standards of which they are capable. Good personalised target setting and support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities provides good levels of challenge and enables them to achieve well. Likewise students who are learning English as an additional language also achieve well, as a result of the good support provided in Years 7 to 11.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Most students have positive attitudes to learning. The good relationships they show improves their confidence and self-esteem and helps them to achieve. Students feel safe in school and say that racist remarks and bullying are rare and dealt with swiftly.

There are clear expectations of behaviour and the school does not shrink from the ultimate sanction of exclusion. Exclusions were high in 2006/07, but consistent whole school strategies and rigorous monitoring have made a significant reduction in the numbers of students now being excluded. Internal exclusion strategies ensure students do not miss out on learning, whilst placing them in an environment where they are closely monitored to smooth the way for reintegration into class. One Year 9 student confirmed that 'internal exclusion was a punishment that meant more, because students still have to work hard rather than being sent home to have an easy day'. A minority of parents expressed concern about behaviour management in some classes. Behaviour is satisfactory, but there are a few instances when the behaviour of a small minority of students disrupts learning, usually when they are not fully engaged with the work, or if behaviour is not well managed.

Students have good opportunities to take on personal responsibilities. For example, Year 11 students are trained to support younger students in Year 7, where they help teachers monitor homework and student diaries. The school has employed many diverse strategies to improve attendance, which is now satisfactory, and the pastoral team provide very good support for the small minority of students where attendance remains a concern.

Students understand how to keep safe both in and out of school. The school's effective health and safety risk assessments and good role modelling by adults has a positive impact on students. Students are well supported to continue in education or employment and almost all Year 11 students progress to further education, training or employment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

In the majority of lessons teachers share lesson objectives and key learning tasks with students, who are well focussed on their learning most of the time. Where teaching is good, and in some instances outstanding, students develop the necessary learning skills to make good progress. In the best lessons observed, teachers use assessment information well to match learning to the needs of individual students. Their energy and passion for their subjects inspire students to want to learn. Questioning techniques which require students to analyse and evaluate key issues, rather than relying upon description, promote good thinking and the development of good reasoning skills. Lessons that include practical learning activities provide good opportunities for all students to work in small groups and develop team working skills.

In satisfactory lessons, students often made slow progress and were not sufficiently challenged to improve their work. When the pace of teaching was too fast, students made less progress because they did not understand the tasks set by the teacher. Marking of student work is satisfactory. The most effective assessment helps students understand how to make progress, but this is not consistent across all subjects and teachers.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum in Year 7 to 11 is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. Since the last inspection, the school has enhanced its specialist technology provision. Provision for ICT is now good. The managed learning environment, increased laptop facilities and, in some lessons, pod casting, offer good opportunities to exploit e-learning. Students have responded enthusiastically to these developments.

The school has increased the choice of courses for GCSE students, through effective partnerships with local colleges. More students are now taking vocational options. The provision for gifted and talented students is improving, but remains underdeveloped.

The leadership of, and provision for, personal, social and health education is good. Topics cater for students' needs and interests and relevant current issues are integrated into schemes of work. The involvement with local groups, parents and extending students knowledge of international communities through increased online learning, contribute to effective community cohesion. High participation rates in extra-curricular activities reflect students' involvement in the life of the school, and they particularly enjoy inter-form sports competitions.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good in Years 7 to 11. Pastoral care and support are outstanding. Academic guidance is at an early stage of development and is satisfactory.

Professionals from healthcare, the police service, careers advice, the schools pastoral managers, learning mentors and learning difficulties and/or disabilities coordinator form a strong multi-agency group. They focus on the most vulnerable students to ensure they have a personal assessment and a support plan, and they regularly monitor to check the impact of actions taken. This well-targeted and sensitive personalised pastoral support is having a positive impact on the progress of students with emotional or learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Targeted support for students from different cultural backgrounds has recently improved as a result of increased resources for this work.

Pupils trust adults and know there is someone to confide in when they have a problem. Good links with a range of external support agencies extend the care provided by the school. Parents commented positively on how the school helped children settle into school in year 7.

The family ethos of the school builds links with, and values comments from, parents. The school has encouraged parents and carers to become more closely involved with their child's progress through running parent workshops and support groups within the school. For example, the catering manager runs workshops on healthy eating with parents of primary school pupils who will join the school in Year 7.

Academic guidance is improving. Targets are now set and reviewed in subject areas. However, targets are not always challenging enough to drive progress forward and academic guidance is not yet having sufficient impact on improving learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The senior leadership team knows the school well and has implemented relevant initiatives to foster improvement. Leaders at all levels are now using a rigorous and wide-ranging cycle of self-evaluation to identify strengths and areas for development. These have already led to some improvements in GCSE results and consequently the school has the capacity to improve further.

A thorough system of tracking of student progress and attainment is now central to the work of subject leaders and year learning managers. Data on student achievement is routinely collated and analysed to inform students, parents and staff about their progress. Teachers are provided with a great deal of relevant data on which to base individual target setting. Senior leaders are setting more challenging targets across the school to raise achievement further.

There are examples of very good leadership within the middle leadership team. For example, in technology, managers have successfully introduced a thorough system of assessment for learning to improve further student achievement. This good practice is not yet shared across all areas of the school, and assessment practice and feedback remains inconsistent.

Governors are very supportive of the school and actively seek to further its role within the local community. Changes to the governing body structure, through the creation of sub-committees, has begun to further their understanding of the school and its accountability. The recent appointment of a business manager has strengthened the school's financial management, and in the context of satisfactory student achievement, value for money is satisfactory.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3	3
The attendance of learners	3	3
The behaviour of learners	3	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

10 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Northolt High School, Middlesex, UB5 4HP

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently, I would like to thank you for making us so welcome and helping us with the inspection. We enjoyed meeting and talking to you, in your lessons and around the school. Many of you and your parents/carers spoke positively about the school. We have taken these views into account in arriving at our judgement that your school is providing a satisfactory standard of education. Care guidance and support, personal development and the range of courses available are good. The school is an inclusive and harmonious community, where you learn to work well together and respect others.

In 2007 the school was concerned that students in Years 10 and 11 had not made enough progress. Staff worked hard to change this and in 2008, GCSE results improved and progress across the school was satisfactory. Managers are aware that they need to raise standards and achievement further, especially in English and mathematics.

Attendance has improved and behaviour is satisfactory. The school is making progress in introducing independent learning activities into your lessons. Your behaviour and learning are at their best when you are actively involved in your work. We have asked the school to share some of these ways of building learning power across all subjects, so that you can be fully involved in lessons in all your subjects. Assessment and marking of work varies between teachers and subjects. We have asked the school to make sure that this is more consistent and that you receive regular feedback on your progress, and how to improve your work.

The increasing range of vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 is helping to meet different students' interests and abilities. Many of you join in extra curricular activities after school or at lunchtimes. There are not enough vocational courses for the sixth form, and we have asked to school to make better use of their partnerships with other schools and college to extend these.

Managers have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement and are committed to improving the school further to give you all the best opportunities possible to do well. You told us that you would welcome more opportunities to express your views and contribute to the school's development. I hope you will all be able to contribute to making your school's determination to improve from satisfactory with some good features, to being good in all aspects in the future.

Yours sincerely

Janet Mercer

Her Majesty's Inspector